On the Large Carriages Drawn by White Oxen

The large carriages drawn by white oxen described in the Lotus Sutra are the carriages that we and others who are votaries of the Lotus Sutra ride in. These carriages are described in detail in the "Simile and Parable" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. But when Kumārajīva translated that passage in the sutra he somewhat abbreviated the original, and the description is thus not given in full.

The Sanskrit text from India describes in greater detail the adornments on the carriages and similar matters as well as the seven kinds of treasures—hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself. I, Nichiren, have made a general survey of the text.

To begin with, regarding these carriages we are told that they measure 500 yojanas in length and breadth, that they are equipped with gold wheels and silver roof beams. Ropes of gold are twined around them on all eight sides, 37 steps plated in shining silver lead up to them, and 84,000 jeweled bells hang down on all four sides. Flags of crimson brocade, 360 of them, fly from jade flagstaffs; on 42,000 railings the four heavenly kings stand guard; and within the carriages, seated on jeweled lotuses, are more than 69,380 Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Shakra and his retinue attend the carriages, performing 1,200 kinds of music; the king Brahmā holds a canopy over them; and the gods of the earth level the mountains, rivers, and other obstacles in the ground before them, making it even. Thus these large carriages drawn by white oxen are able to fly at will through the sky of the essential nature of phenomena.

Those persons who come after me will ride in these carriages and journey to Eagle Peak. And I, Nichiren, riding in the same kind of carriage, will come out to greet them. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nichiren

Background

Neither the date nor the recipient of this letter is indicated, though it is thought to have been written at Minobu in 1281 and addressed to a lay believer in the Fuji area.

The large carriages drawn by white
oxen that are the subject of this letter are described in the parable of the three carts and the burning house, one of the seven parables in the Lotus Sutra. This particular parable appears in the “Simile and Parable” (3rd) chapter. The large carriages represent the Buddha vehicle of the Lotus Sutra.

In this letter, the Daishonin refers to a Sanskrit text of the sutra in which the description of these grand carriages is even more detailed and impressive than the awe-inspiring explanation that appears in Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation. In stating that his disciples will ride in them and journey to Eagle Peak, he means they will attain Buddhahood. The carriages are a symbol of the Lotus Sutra and its essence, the wonderful Law.